

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2022

Remarks at the United States-Africa Leaders Summit Closing Session on Promoting Food Security and Food Systems Resilience

December 15, 2022

Well, thank you all very much for what has been, from our perspective, a very good conference so far. And we're about at the end. You must be still exhausted from having not caught up on your sleep.

But—I was going to say "good afternoon." It's almost "good evening." And I want to thank you for—[laughter]—thank you for joining me. I understand several flights had to leave, and I'm surprised you all didn't use that excuse. I'm only kidding.

I can't think of a more critical topic to end this summit on. We're facing a global food crisis, and nowhere is it felt more keenly than on the African Continent. Last year, nearly 120 million people in Africa faced a food—acute food insecurity. And only halfway through the—2022, a drought struck and the food costs soared, in part due to Russia's unprovoked war against Ukraine, and the number increased to 140 million people facing acute food insecurity in Africa.

Today, famine once more stalks the Horn of Africa. High food prices and high trade barriers are taking a toll on the lives and livelihoods of millions of people across the continent. And conflict, climate change, COVID-19 continue to compound the impacts of the global food crisis for all countries around this table.

And the challenges we face are both clear, and they are urgent. That's why, this year alone, the United States has committed nearly \$11 billion in humanitarian and food insecurity assistance—food security assistance—assistance to deal with food insecurity, including a dramatic surge on the Horn of Africa.

And this afternoon I'm announcing an additional \$2 billion in humanitarian assistance to address—acute food insecurity in Africa, assistance that's going to help ensure that childrens and families don't have to go to bed hungry.

And we're not stopping there. Food security is an essential to the foundation of a broader peace and prosperity, in my view. Simply put, if a parent can't feed their child, nothing else really matters. So we're bringing everything to bear on this issue in short-, medium-, and long-term efforts.

First, we're deepening our collaboration with countries across Africa to tackle food insecurity. This whole summit we've been focused on Africa's enormous potential for growth—for economic growth—growth that can lift people out of poverty and help lessen chronic hunger.

Africa is also significant unused arable farmland—has a significant amount of it—land that can be used to transform the continent's agricultural sector and food system. I've discussed this with our Secretary of Agriculture, and there's enormous potential. Enormous potential.

And it also—in short, Africa has the potential to feed its people and also help feed the world. The United States is going to continue to work with the AU to advance the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program, which lays out the vision for Africa's food security and climate-resilient future. Already, we're expanding our Feed the Future initiative to eight new countries, all in Africa, to increase our investment in communities hit hardest by the recent food shocks.

Since we started this initiative back when I was Vice President, we've helped lift over 23 million people above the poverty line around the world. And the largest expansion of that help has gone even—we're going to go—the latest expansion will go even further.

We're also making critical investments in trade and transportation infrastructure, like the Millennium Challenge Corporation Regional transit—Transport Compact, the one that I announced yesterday, so food can move more quickly and easily from farmers to markets, from markets to families who need it.

And we're collaborating with countries across the continent to expand access to new markets and reduce trade barriers that constrict access to food, including by supporting the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement [Area; White House correction].

Next, we're strengthening our partnership with the private sector to help transform investments into impact. Today the United States is launching a new strategic partnership with the African Union. We're teaming up to create a more resilient food system, improving how communities can grow, sell, and buy their own food. This includes investing in infrastructure that will promote sustainable food security, like irrigation, roads, grain storage, and so much more.

We're also working with the private sector to expand investment—an investment that's going to significantly increase agricultural inputs like fertilizer and climate-resilient seeds which will enable more food production and more reliable food supplies.

And finally, we're bringing the world together to meet this global challenge. We're going to continue to ensure that the G-7 and the G-20 remain focused on food security. As I announced earlier today, we fully support the African Union joining the G-20 as a permanent member.

We also continue to support extending the U.N.-brokered deal to facilitate the export of Ukrainian grain, which will benefit not only Africa, but people around the globe.

We're going to continue supporting multilateral organizations like the World Food Programme and the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program. They're going to help boost agriculture production, mitigate food shortages, and promote intra-African trade.

Let me close with this. A few days ago, President Sall was asked what's—what success at this summit would look like. Mr. President, I recall you saying that the United States must show, quote, "the will to work with Africans." Success will show the will to work with Africans. And I believe that is on a concrete, sustainable solution that we are committed to in the United States. We have the will to work with Africans, and we need you.

President Sall, every leader around this room, I hope we're making it clear, today and every day, it's not just showing the will, but doing the work. And there's a lot of work to be done. This is a global food security crisis, and we need to solve it together. Your leadership and partnership is absolutely essential to solving it.

So this afternoon I want to listen. I want to hear from you about what more we should be doing. And with that, I'm now going to turn this over to Secretary Yellen, our Secretary of the Treasury, to get the conversation started.

Again, thank you again for being here. And thank you for being part of what, so far, has been a useful conference.

Madam Secretary.

[At this point, Secretary of the Treasury Janet L. Yellen made remarks; no transcript was provided.]

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:49 p.m. at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to President Macky Sall of Senegal, in his capacity as Chair of the African Union.

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